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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

CONSUMER AND MARKETING SERVICE

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OFFICIAL UNITED STATES STANDARDS FOR GRADES OF FEEDER CATTLE

(Title 7, Ch. I, Pt. 53, Sections 53.201, 53.202, 53.207 and 53.208 of the Code of Federal Regulations)

The following is a reprint of the Official United States Standards for the Grades of Feeder Cattle promulgated by the Department of Agriculture under the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 (60 Stat. 1087; 7 U.S.C. 1621 et seq.), as amended, and related authority in the annual appropriation acts for the Department of Agriculture. The standards are reprinted as adopted effective September 25, 1964.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE STANDARDS

Tentative grade standards for stocker and feeder cattle were first developed by the Department of Agriculture in 1925. The standards for stocker and feeder steers were changed slightly and reprinted with illustrations in 1934.

In 1938 standards for grades of feeder cattle were issued by the Department of Agriculture in Circular 505, "Market Classes and Grades of Feeder and Stocker Cattle". These standards were slightly revised in 1942 but were never promulgated as official standards.

These tentative standards served as a basis for Federal and Federal-State livestock market news reports on feeder cattle. Also, rather wide-spread use was made of these tentative standards by several State Departments of Agriculture and State Extension Services in feeder cattle grading and educational programs.

Official standards for grades of feeder cattle were proposed by the United States Department of Agriculture in 1963. Slight revisions were made in the proposed standards prior to their promulgation as the Official United States standards for grades of feeder cattle, effective September 25, 1964.

APPLICATION OF STANDARDS

The official standards for live cattle developed by the United States Department of Agriculture provide for segregation first according to use--slaughter and feeder--then as to class, which is determined by sex condition, and then as to grade, which is determined by the apparent relative excellence and desirability of the animal for its particular use. Differentiation between slaughter and feeder cattle is based solely on their intended use rather than on

specific identifiable characteristics of the cattle. Slaughter cattle are those which are intended for slaughter immediately or in the very near future. Feeder cattle are those which are intended for slaughter after a period of feeding. However, under some economic conditions, specific kinds of cattle may be considered as feeders, whereas under other economic conditions they might be considered as slaughter cattle.

CLASSES

The classes of slaughter and feeder cattle are steers, heifers, cows, bulls, and stags. Definitions of the respective classes are as follows:

BULL.--A bull is an uncastrated male bovine.

STEER.--A steer is a male bovine castrated when young and prior to developing the secondary physical characteristics of a bull.

STAG.--A stag is a male bovine castrated after it has developed or begun to develop the secondary physical characteristics of a bull.

COW.--A cow is a female bovine that has developed through reproduction or with age, relatively prominent hips, a large middle, and other physical characteristics typical of mature females.

HEIFER.--A heifer is an immature female bovine that has not developed the physical characteristics typical of cows.

GRADE FACTORS

The term "cattle" as used in these standards includes bovines of all ages.

The grade of a feeder animal is determined from a composite evaluation of two general value-determining characteristics--its logical slaughter potential (as beef) and its thriftiness.

The logical slaughter potential of an animal is its slaughter grade at that stage of its development as beef--not as veal or calf--when its carcass quality grade and its carcass conformation grade would be equal.

Animals expected to produce superior slaughter conformation--and therefore have a superior logical slaughter potential--have very thick muscling in relation to their height and length. They also have wide, deep, rugged frames; short, wide heads; moderately large bones and smooth, refined joints; and practically always have a very high proportion of beef breeding. Animals expected to produce inferior slaughter conformation--and an inferior logical slaughter potential--have very thin muscling in relation to their height and length. They also are lacking in ruggedness; have long, narrow heads; have either very small or large, coarse bones; and practically always have little or no beef breeding.

Thriftiness refers to the ability of a feeder animal to gain weight and fatten rapidly and efficiently. Extremely thrifty cattle are healthy, have wide, roomy middles with well sprung ribs, are large for their age and have an alert manner.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

While the grade of a feeder animal is determined from a composite evaluation of its logical slaughter potential and its thriftiness, the logical slaughter potential is given primary consideration.

Thus, conformation or inherent muscular development is the most important single factor affecting the grade of a feeder animal.

In these feeder cattle standards conformation is determined by appraising the development of the muscular system in relation to the development of the skeletal system. Degree of fatness is not a factor. However, since the grade standards include detailed descriptions of the various parts of the animal and since this appearance may be influenced to a considerable extent by variations in fatness, the standards for all of the grades describe animals that have a slightly thin covering of fat. When grading animals which have either a greater or lesser degree of fatness than that on which the standards are based, proper allowances must be made for the effect of these differences on the appearance of the various parts.

Cattle deposit fat at a relatively faster rate over the loin and back, and in the flank, cod, twist, and brisket than they do on other parts of their bodies. Therefore, as cattle increase in fatness, these parts appear progressively fuller, thicker, and more distended in relation to the thickness through the rear quarter and to the fullness of the forearm and gaskin. Since relatively little fat is deposited over these latter parts, their appearance is affected relatively little by variations in fatness. In evaluating the conformation of feeder cattle, it is important to properly evaluate the muscling in all parts of the animal. However, since variations in fatness and variations in the spring of the ribs make it especially difficult to precisely evaluate the muscling in the loin and back, major emphasis should be placed on the development of muscling in the rear quarter as an indicator of overall muscling. Unless proper allowance is made for variations in fatness, animals carrying considerable finish may be assumed to have greater thickness of muscling throughout their loins and backs than actually is the case, whereas those which are very thin may be more muscular in these parts than their appearance might indicate.

Thriftiness is a factor affecting the grade of a feeder animal only when the animal is relatively less thrifty than normally associated with a particular development as described for the various grades. In such a case, the final grade of the feeder animal may be lowered from that indicated by other grade factors. The amount of this reduction in grade will vary from practically none to one full grade, dependent upon the degree of unthriftiness and the grade involved. For example, a feeder animal otherwise eligible for the Utility grade would have its final grade lowered little, if any, due to a lack of thriftiness as compared with that specified for that grade. However, since Prime grade feeders are expected to have a high degree of thriftiness, the final grade of a feeder animal otherwise eligible for that grade might be lowered one full grade if its thriftiness were considerably less than that indicated for Prime. On the other hand, superior thriftiness as compared with that described for each of the grades cannot compensate for a relatively lower slaughter potential, i.e., the final grade of a feeder may be no higher than its logical slaughter potential.

Maturity is not normally a factor in determining the grade of a feeder animal. However, the animal's likely maturity at the time it reaches its logical slaughter potential must be considered in relation to certain approximate maximum and minimum maturity limits for various grades of slaughter cattle. These are as follows: Prime, 36 months maximum; Choice, 42 months maximum; Good and

Standard, 48 months maximum; Commercial 48 months minimum. There are no maturity limits for the Utility, Cutter, and Canner grades.

The standards for grades of feeder cattle--like those for slaughter cattle--are designed to cover the full range of variability in cattle. This being the case, at any stage in their development, cattle may be graded either as feeder or slaughter animals. The slaughter grade of most feeder cattle generally would be lower than their grade as feeders. For example, many Prime or Choice grade feeder cattle would grade only Standard as slaughter cattle. However, this situation does not always prevail. Some feeder cattle, particularly in the lower grades, may have characteristics which indicate that their carcass quality would have a relatively higher degree of development than their conformation. Since the carcass quality of such an animal would be relatively higher than its logical slaughter potential, its grade as a slaughter animal could be higher than its feeder grade. For example, an animal might have had a logical slaughter potential of the upper part of the Utility grade and, therefore, its feeder grade would be Utility. However, if such an animal had a carcass quality equal to the upper part of the Standard grade, its slaughter grade would be Standard.

Because it is impractical to describe the nearly limitless number of recognizable combinations of characteristics which feeder animals might have and qualify for a particular grade, the standards for each grade describe only animals which have a similar development of the various grade factors which are generally representative of the lower limits of each grade. The following standards for grades of feeder cattle apply only to steers, heifers, and cows. Stags and bulls are used as feeders only infrequently; therefore, standards for grades of those classes are not included herein.

SPECIFICATIONS FOR OFFICIAL UNITED STATES STANDARDS FOR GRADES OF FEEDER CATTLE (STEERS, HEIFERS, AND COWS)

PRIME

Feeder cattle which possess typical minimum qualifications for the Prime grade are extremely thrifty and are very large for their age, breed considered. They are very thickly muscled throughout. They are wide through the chest with well sprung ribs and are moderately wide and thick through the crops, back, and loin. The rounds tend to be thick and the twist is moderately deep. They usually have straight top and bottom lines and usually are moderately deep in the fore and rear flanks. The legs tend to be short, are set wide apart, and usually are straight. The head is usually short and wide and the neck usually is short and thick. They have large, rugged frames with moderately large but refined bone. They have a high degree of symmetry and smoothness throughout and usually show no evidence of non-beef breeding. They have a logical slaughter potential of Prime. Only steers and heifers are eligible for the Prime grade.

CHOICE

Feeder cattle which possess typical minimum qualifications for the Choice grade are very thrifty and are large for their age, breed considered. They are thickly muscled throughout. They are moderately wide through the chest with a moderate spring of ribs and

are slightly wide and thick through the crops, back, and loin. The rounds are slightly thick and the twist is slightly deep. They usually have straight top lines and usually are moderately deep in the fore and rear flanks. The legs are slightly short, and are set moderately wide apart and usually are straight. The head usually is moderately short and wide and the neck usually is slightly short and thick. They have moderately large, rugged frames, and the bone usually is moderately large, but may be slightly fine or slightly large and coarse. They have a moderate degree of symmetry and smoothness throughout and usually show a very high proportion of beef breeding. They have a logical slaughter potential of Choice.

GOOD

Feeder cattle which possess typical minimum qualifications for the Good grade are thrifty but may be slightly small for their age, breed considered. They are slightly thick muscled throughout. They are slightly narrow through the chest and may be slightly deficient in spring of rib. They are slightly narrow through the crops, back, and loin. The muscles of the rump are slightly sunken and the hips and shoulder joints are slightly prominent. The rounds are slightly thin, and the twist is slightly shallow. They usually have moderately straight top lines but may lack depth in the rear flank. The legs tend to be slightly long, are set slightly wide apart and frequently are crooked. The head is usually slightly short and wide and the neck usually is slightly long and thin. They have a slightly large frame and the bone usually is slightly fine, although it may also be slightly large and coarse. They are slightly fine, although it may also be slightly large and coarse. They are slightly irregular and rough in appearance and usually are predominantly of beef breeding. They have a logical slaughter potential of Good.

STANDARD

Feeder cattle which possess typical minimum qualifications for the Standard grade are only moderately thrifty and are moderately small for their age, breed considered. They are slightly thin muscled and are angular, rough, and irregular in appearance throughout. They tend to be narrow through the chest and through the crops, and the muscles of the back, loin, and rump tend to be slightly sunken. Hips and shoulder joints are prominent. The rounds are thin and slightly concave and the twist is shallow. They usually have an uneven top line and may lack depth in the rear flank. The legs are long, set close together, and are usually crooked. The head usually is long and narrow and the neck usually long and thin. They have a slightly small frame and the bone is usually moderately fine, although it also may be moderately large and coarse. They are usually predominantly of non-beef breeding and have a logical slaughter potential of Standard.

COMMERCIAL

The Commercial grade for feeder cattle is restricted to cattle that will be too mature for the Good or Standard grade when they reach their logical slaughter potential. These will usually be cows. Cattle possessing typical minimum qualifications for the Commercial grade are moderately thrifty but are slightly thin muscled and

are angular, rough, and irregular in appearance throughout. They tend to be narrow through the chest and crops, and the muscles of the back, loin, and rump tend to be slightly sunken. Hips and shoulder joints are prominent. The rounds are thin and slightly concave and the twist is shallow. They usually have an uneven top line and may lack depth in the rear flank. The legs are long and set close together. The head usually is long and narrow and the neck usually long and thin. Although cattle near the lower limits of the grade may be predominantly of non-beef breeding, the majority of feeder cattle in this grade are predominantly of beef breeding. They have a logical slaughter potential of Commercial.

UTILITY

Feeder cattle which possess typical minimum qualifications for the Utility grade are slightly unthrifty and are small for their age, breed considered. They are thinly muscled throughout and are very angular, rough, and irregular in appearance. They are very narrow through the chest and the crops and the muscles of the back, loin, and rump are sunken. Hips and shoulder joints are very prominent. The rounds are very thin and concave and the twist is very shallow. They usually have an irregular top line and are cut up in the rear flank. The legs are very long, are set very close together, and are usually crooked. The head usually is very long and narrow and the neck usually is decidedly long and thin. They have a very small frame and the bone usually is very fine, although it also may be large and coarse. They usually have little or no evidence of beef breeding and have a logical slaughter potential of Utility.

INFERIOR

Feeder cattle inferior to those described for Utility are graded Inferior.



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